

Justus Fiechtner, MD, MPH: Testimony before the Michigan House of Representatives

~~Appropriations~~ Committee, May 23, 2006,

Health Policy

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today about a matter, which has been of utmost importance to me as a rheumatology physician and to 2.5 million Michigan citizens who suffer from arthritis. My name is Justus Fiechtner and I moved to Lansing 16 years ago because of the promise of establishing a unique program, which specifically was meant to encourage exercise and a healthy lifestyle for people with arthritis. We did start such a program, but it has been very limited because of the lack of insurance support for exercise and education. Research at the time was only beginning to emerge as to the value of such a preventative approach to chronic disease care. Subsequently, each new year has brought more and more evidence that the most cost-effective approach to many diseases, including arthritis, is exercise. Other convincing studies in arthritis care specifically have established the benefit of educational self-help courses to improve function and decrease medicine expenses and healthcare provider visits. These studies have been so convincing that the US Center for Disease Control has endorsed these models and has provided incentives to states to promote exercise and self-help courses directed at patients with arthritis. In the past this state has been the beneficiary of federal funds to promote these specific programs. Unfortunately, last year's budget excluded matching support from Michigan and we had to abandon some of our established efforts in this arena. Thus, I am here to ask you to re-establish **The Arthritis Prevention and Control Act.**

I have had the privilege of serving the State of Michigan in a voluntary capacity as a member of the Chronic Disease Advisory Committee under Governor Engler and on the Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee under Governor Granholm. I have over ten years of experience on the Board of Directors of the Michigan Arthritis Foundation, and acted as its chairman for two years. Those experiences coupled with many years of daily interaction with my patients with significant arthritis have strengthened my resolve to seek the best approach to minimize the ultimate effects of the number one cause of work disability and chronic pain in this state, and in this nation, arthritis.

Thank you once again for your attention and action to re-establish this very important act.